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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 001211

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TAGS: PREL PGOV GG RS
SUBJECT: RUSSIA-GEORGIA: "FRIENDS" DEMARCHE; MORE TROOPS
FOR PKO

REF: MOSCOW 1170

Classified By: CDA Daniel A. Russell. Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Russia responded to the April 29 joint demarche on Abkhazia by the four Friends with the well-rehearsed recitation of its policy and announcement of a plan to increase the number of CIS peacekeepers in Abkhazia to 3000. MFA Fourth CIS Department Director Kelin expressed displeasure at the "breakdown" of the Friends Group and insisted that the April 16 Putin instructions had been a restrained response given both Georgian moves and the Kosovo "precedent." Kelin announced reinforcement of the CIS peacekeeping force of up to 1000 more troops, claiming this was necessary to counterbalance Georgia's military build-up in the Upper Kodori and along the "border." Kelin questioned the authenticity of the video publicized by the GOG as evidence of Russian involvement in the April 21 UAV shootdown incident. Charge expressed serious concern about the introduction of more troops into Abkhazia and reminded Kelin of our call on all sides to show restraint. End summary.

¶2. (C) On April 29, the Charge d'Affaires, jointly with Charges from Germany and the UK, and the French Deputy Chief of Mission, delivered a demarche on Abkhazia to MFA Fourth CIS Director Andrey Kelin. The demarche urged the GOR to revoke or not implement Putin's April 16 instructions, expressed deep concern about the shooting down of the Georgian UAV over Abkhazia, recommended a UNOMIG investigation of the incident, and requested a meeting of the Friends as soon as possible. The demarche reiterated strong support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and called on all parties to renounce any armed action.

¶3. (C) Reiterating DFM Denisov's April 24 points to the visiting UK Permanent Under Secretary Rickett (reftel), Kelin stressed Russia's continuing respect for Georgia's territorial integrity and alleged that the GOR's efforts to promote peace and goodwill had not been reciprocated by Georgia. Per Kelin, in the aftermath of Kosovo's declaration of independence and "destabilizing" Georgian moves in the Upper Kodori George, Putin's instructions were the minimum Russia could do to alleviate the mounting furor in the Duma and the Federation Council, among the public, and in the separatist regions. The instructions were designed to respond to the basic needs of the population when Georgia, having neither control over Abkhazia nor the trust of the Abkhaz, could not meet the basic needs of Abkhaz residents. After 15 years, the people of Abkhazia had expectations that their basic needs and rights would be met from economic opportunity to education. Putin's instructions were intended to address the humanitarian needs and economic aspirations of the population of Abkhazia. This meant Russia had to have contact with de facto authorities, said Kelin. Kelin was vague about the "mechanisms" to accomplish this, but indicated Russian government agencies would work together with their Abkhaz counterparts such as the Russian Ministry

of Justice's involvement in combating organized crime in Abkhazia. In response to the Charge's request, Kelin declined to provide the text of the Putin instructions.

¶4. (C) Kelin categorically stated that Russia had no plans for military moves in Abkhazia. As for military-technical cooperation with Abkhazia, "that was excluded," he said. Kelin insisted that Russia's actions were in conformity with international law and should not preclude cooperation with Georgia. Kelin said that Georgia's participation in helping the Abkhaz people would be welcome. Kelin also pointed out that Russia's steps to increase cooperation and communication with Georgia. He cited Putin's lengthy phone call with Saakashvili and the resumption of direct transportation links days after the instructions were issued. He did not explicitly deny Russian responsibility for the April 21 UAV incident but questioned the authenticity of the video. He highlighted the strange behavior of the fighter flying beneath the UAV and firing up (against the normal practice of firing down), the fact that the missile launched from a pylon fitted near the end of the wing, whereas weapons pylons on Russian MIGs were located much closer to the fuselage, the mysterious white trace which was not indication of an air-to-air missile launch, and the topography on the video that does not correspond to the locality of the incident. Kelin claimed that it was unclear when and where the Georgians recorded the video but it was "not accidental" they refused to show the video at the April 23 UNSC session.

¶5. (C) Kelin broke the news of the GOR's plan to increase the number of CIS peacekeepers in Abkhazia from 2000 to 3000 which, he said, was consistent with the PKO's mandate. (Note: The troop limits were set out in the Decision of CIS Heads of State signed on August 22, 1994.) Kelin claimed that the

MOSCOW 00001211 002 OF 002

increase was necessary to counterbalance Georgia's violation of the 1994 Moscow Agreement, specifically the continued presence of Georgian troops in the Upper Kodori George and the overflights of Abkhazia by Georgian drones. He cited Georgia's "destabilizing" military build-up along the "border" -- up to 1500 troops and 6 artillery pieces -- and up to 26 UAV flights over Abkhazia since last August. He also cited the Patriot Youth Camp which continued its activities in defiance of the UNSYG's advice to close it. Kelin blamed Georgia for its failure to build trust and refuse to sign the non-use of violence agreement with the Abkhaz. Under such circumstances, the presence of Russian peacekeepers remained the decisive factor in preventing an escalation of tensions. The Charge reminded Kelin that the U.S. was urging all sides to show restraint; a military solution was not an option; and the introduction of more troops would only increase tensions.

6. (C) Kelin expressed displeasure at the "breakdown" of the Friends Group and commented that the Friends process was stalled. When the German Charge asked for a preliminary reaction to the idea of a Friends meeting in one of the capitals, Kelin said that the GOR was not against a Friends' meeting but asked that it be scheduled after May 10, following the Russian presidential inauguration and holidays.

On the idea of a UNOMIG investigation of the UAV incident, Kelin simply claimed that the GOR had not yet received anything official from UNOMIG to convene an investigation. He added that as a first step, UNOMIG should be in contact with the de facto Abkhaz authorities.

¶7. (C) The MFA issued a public statement a few hours later, restating the points made by Kelin. The statement followed an earlier announcement by the Ministry of Defense that Georgia was preparing to wage a war in Abkhazia; the assertion by Valeriy Kenyaikin, MFA Special Representative for the CIS, that Russia would react with military means if Georgia-Abkhazia relations could not prevent a military scenario; and the commentary of Sergey Mironov, Chairman of the Federation Council, that Russia's military involvement

would be justified if lives of Russian citizens are threatened in Abkhazia.

RUSSELL